



**Opening Statement (as prepared for delivery)**  
**Senator John D. Rockefeller IV**  
**Pipeline Safety: An On-the-Ground Look at**  
**Safeguarding the Public**  
**Chairman of the Senate Committee on**  
**Commerce, Science, and Transportation**

They crisscross underneath our cities and country sides, yet most of the time we are not even aware they are there. They deliver critical fuel that powers our homes, factories, and offices; and also transport the oil and gas that keep our cars, trucks, and planes operating. They are the critical conduit between the shale gas development boom in our region and the rest of the country.

Most days, the network of pipelines operates across the country without a hitch. Compared to other forms of transportation, pipelines are a relatively safe, clean and efficient way of transporting the goods they carry. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

Everyone in this room knows all too well what can happen when something goes wrong. Last month's incident in Sissonville was a startling reminder of the destruction that can occur when a pipeline ruptures. Houses were destroyed and portions of the nearby interstate were literally disintegrated by the overwhelming heat of flames from the ruptured pipe.

We can only thank our lucky stars that there were no lives lost or serious injuries. As we have seen with other accidents in the last few years, we are not always so lucky.

After the explosion in Sissonville, we must sustain our focus on making sure the pipeline industry and all industries operate as safely as possible. While we do not yet know the exact cause of the Sissonville incident, today's hearing provides the opportunity to examine where we stand in regard to the safety of our nation's pipeline system.

When I took over as Chairman of the Commerce Committee, I made consumer protection and public safety my key priorities. Accordingly, the Committee has been very active on the safety front and these efforts have resulted in safety improvements across several industries, from aviation to trucking to automobiles.

As for pipeline safety, the Committee has held multiple hearings and successfully worked with our colleagues in the House to pass a pipeline safety bill into law just over one year ago. This law – The Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011 – was largely based on legislation we passed out of the Commerce Committee and through the Senate. This legislation included a number of new requirements that will move the ball forward in pipeline safety.

For example, we laid the foundation to require the use of remote controlled and automatic shut-off valves on new pipelines – something I know we'll discuss today.

We removed exemptions from requirements to call and get underground lines marked before you excavate. Year after year, excavation damage is the leading cause of pipeline accidents. Removing exemptions from who has to “call before you dig” will reduce this problem.

We required operators to verify records and re-establish lines' maximum operating pressure. Lack of records about older pipelines is a real problem and contributed to a catastrophic pipeline explosion in California that killed several people.

We required that critical pipeline location and inspection information be provided to the public to build greater awareness of the lines that exist in and around our communities.

Finally, we increased penalties on operators who shirk the safety regulations. This will help deter bad actors from avoiding their safety obligations.

While I was pleased with the progress we made in last year's law, I pushed for stronger requirements to move pipeline safety even further ahead. The Senate-passed bill, while not perfect, included a number of more stringent requirements for operators, but House negotiators demanded watered-down provisions for an agreement to move forward.

On the bright side, I'm confident that we will see strong, but fair and sensible, safety regulations out of our legislation. That's one of the things I want to discuss today with our federal panel of witnesses.

It was a tough fight to get pipeline safety legislation signed into law. However, it's important that we continue to provide rigorous oversight of the industry to determine whether serious gaps still exist in our safety requirements. Today is a perfect opportunity to take stock in where we

are and consider what steps might be necessary moving forward.

I'm excited about the witnesses we will hear from today. Most notably, I welcome Sue Bonham – a resident of Sissonville – who will tell her very personal story about her experiences the day of the Sissonville explosion. Ms. Bonham provides a unique and important perspective as someone who was directly affected, and it's vital that we hear her points of view and keep them in mind. As we consider what steps are necessary moving forward, we must remember these are crucial decisions and policies that have real impact on people's lives.

Thanks also to Senator Manchin for taking time to join us today. I appreciate his interest in this issue which, as was made intensely clear to us last month, is significant to the people of West Virginia.

Let's get started.